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RICHLAND SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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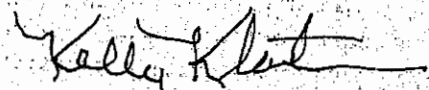
RE: Comments for proposed rules of the Conservation Security Program (CSP)

The Richland Soil Conservation District would like to express concerns regarding the proposed rules of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). We do not believe the proposed rules, as currently written, follow the intent of the legislation. There are three issues in the proposed rule that are most troubling for our district.

- 1) **The rule does not provide a reward system for conservation farmers and ranchers as enacted in the law.** The 2003 omnibus appropriation bill applied a 3.8 billion dollar cap to the program, and while this was recently changed by the 2004 omnibus appropriation, we still believe additional changes are needed. It is essential for NRCS to develop, release and seek comment on a supplement to the rule based on CSP as an uncapped entitlement program that is available to all producers as defined in the law. The proposed rule uses state and local rental rates, but reduces the base payment to 10 percent to the already reduced rate in the law. The rule should provide cost share rates and base payments at the level as provided for in the statute and remove the limitation on the types of practices eligible for payment.
- 2) **The program is not available to farmers and ranchers nationwide.** CSP was intended to be a nationwide program. The rule states that NRCS will identify and offer CSP only in high priority watersheds, chosen at the national level. This flies in the face of locally led conservation, which is touted in almost all the conservation programs in the 2002 Farm Bill. According to the statute, eligible land includes "private agricultural land (including cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture land, and rangeland), land under the jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe (as defined by the Secretary), and forested land that is an incidental part of an agricultural operation." There is not a reference to giving preferences to producers within a watershed. There is a need for a supplement to the rule to remove the watershed limitation.
- 3) **The rule proposes that parcels of land for which the producer can not demonstrate control of the land for five or more years will not be eligible for CSP payments.** However, the land is required to be maintained at the same conservation standard as the rest of the operation, and the land is considered within the area of the contract. Therefore, failure to maintain the standard would result in contract violation. In addition, many farmers in our district do not own the land they operate and it is difficult for them to obtain lease agreement for longer than a five year period. As a result this requirement will severely limit the number of producers in our district who would be eligible for the program.

The CSP rule can and should reflect the intent of the legislation. We urge USDA and NRCS to issue a new rule more in-tune with the intended legislation. The CSP rule should reflect the nation-wide, entitlement program for good working lands stewardship as it was passed by Congress.

Sincerely,



Kelly Klosterman, Chairman
Richland Soil Conservation District



Pittsylvania
Soil & Water Conservation District
P.O. Box 9
Chatham, Virginia 24531

(434) 432-8146 FAX: (434) 432-2068

A PARTNERSHIP TO CONSERVE NATURAL RESOURCES

C O N S E R V A T I O N

February 25, 2004

ATTN: Mr. David McKay,
Conservation Operations Division
NRCS
P. O. Box 2890
Washington, D. C. 20013

Dear Mr. McKay:

The Pittsylvania Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Directors discussed the federal register notice soliciting comments for the Conservation Security Program at our February, 2004 meeting. Our directors would like to submit the following proposal for consideration as follows (See attached comment sheet):

Item #7. Leveraging CSP (page 202, column 1). NRCS is seeking comment on how to implement a program that uses collaboration and leveraging of funds to achieve resource improvements on working agricultural lands through intensive management activities and innovative technologies:

Comments:

Federal tax credits should be available to producers
who apply approved conservation practices

Thank you for the opportunity to give our suggestions in this matter.

Sincerely,

Aubrey R. Pritchett, Chairman
Pittsylvania SWCD

Enclosure

and other less capitalized producers to become eligible for CSP, given the stewardship standards to participate, are also welcome.

Comments: _____

6. Leveraging CSP (page 201, column 3). NRCS is seeking comment on the opportunity to use CSP in a collaborative mode with other programs to effectively leverage the Federal contribution to resource improvement and enhancement.

Comments: _____

7. Leveraging CSP (page 202, column 1). NRCS is seeking comment on how to implement a program that uses collaboration and leveraging of funds to achieve resource improvements on working agricultural lands through intensive management activities and innovative technologies.

Comments: *Federal Tax Credits should be available to
producers who apply approved Conservation
practices*

8. Environmental Performance, Evaluation and Accountability (page 202, column 3). NRCS welcomes comments and suggestions for designing and implementing evaluation approaches, and suggestions as to what data and information would be most useful to ensure a high level of accountability for CSP.

Comments: _____

9. Significant Resource Concerns (page 203). NRCS is proposing to designate water quality and soil quality as nationally significant resource concerns. NRCS requests additional public comment on the use of nationally significant resource concerns.

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Headwaters
Soil & Water Conservation District
P.O. Box 70
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(540) 248-4328 Extension 3
Fax (540) 248-1142

March 1, 2004

David McKay, Conservation Planning Team Leader
USDA-NRCS
Conservation Operations Division
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013-2890

RE: Conservation Security Program

Dear Mr. McKay:

The Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District's Forestry Committee would like to provide a comment on the proposed Conservation Security Program.

Our committee feels that further clarification is needed in the forestry provisions of the program. We are also confused about the Forestry Standard.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Charles Huppuch/cp

Charles Huppuch, Forestry Committee Chair
Headwaters SWCD

cc: Charles E. Horn
Richard P. Coon
Robert N. Whitescarver

cbp



WASHINGTON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Mr. David McKay
Attention: Conservation Security Program
Conservation Planning Team Leader
Conservation Operations Division
USDA NRCS
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013-2890

Email: david.mckay@usda.gov, Attention: Conservation Security Program

Dear Mr. McKay:

We are pleased to submit comments on the proposed rule to implement the 2002 Farm Bill Conservation Security Program. First, we applaud NRCS for developing a proposed rule in the face of the number of legislative changes that were made to the program following its enactment.

We have several concerns relative to the proposed rule. We understand that during the development of the proposed rule changes were made to the statute that altered it from an uncapped entitlement program to a "capped entitlement" to be funded at approximately \$3.8 billion over 10 years. Given that change, NRCS proposed a much more limited program that would be available only to a relatively small number of producers in highly targeted watersheds. The proposed rule also placed significantly lower limits on cost-share rates and base payments than were allowed in the statute; restricted the number and types of practices that would be eligible for payment; and required producers to address resource concerns prior to enrolling in the program.

The enactment of the 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Bill, however, restored the CSP to an uncapped entitlement as it was originally written. Given that fact, we strongly urge NRCS to prepare a rule to implement the program as originally intended and without the severe restrictions in the currently proposed rule. The principal issues that need to be addressed in the supplement to properly implement the CSP as an uncapped entitlement include:

- allowing open enrollment to all eligible producers nationwide with no preference

- for producers in targeted watersheds;
- providing the full cost-share, maintenance and base payments as provided for in the statute;
 - removing the limitation on the types of practices eligible for payment; and
 - making the CSP a true rewards program by allowing producers to use CSP to address resource concerns after enrollment.
 - Make payments to producer or producers with risk in crop or livestock in operation
 - Set rental rates on a district by district basis' through a local working group with final OK by state committee

David R Kang
Dianne Kujawa
Derald Lill
Gary Hongsamer
Roy Beyman

Dear Chief Bruce I. Knight,

2/26/04

Please consider the following comments in finalizing the Proposed Rule for the Conservation Security Program.

The current proposed rule looks like an attempt to implement a potentially large (enormous) national conservation program while under the constraint of a very restrictive spending cap.

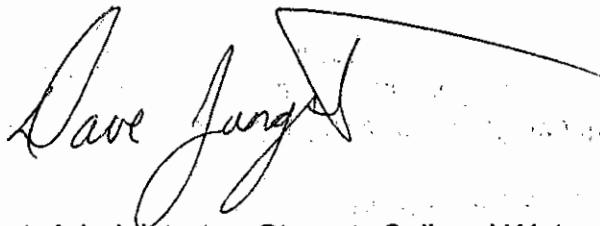
I sincerely hope the Omnibus Appropriations bill for FY 04 passes and removes the \$3.8 billion cap. I then see the CSP as potentially replacing the status quo agricultural subsidy programs administered by the USDA FSA. The rationale is that if the public / taxpayer / govt. / country is to give money to a farmer, they should be able to expect something in return (more than the farmer to simply be in business tomorrow). A reasonable expectation is a higher level of environmental quality and stewardship.

A method to achieve this under the current rule would be allowing the farmer an option to voluntarily give up their FSA subsidies (direct and counter cyclical payments) in exchange for equal or greater CSP payments by achieving tier I, II, or III requirements. This would cost the public the same or slightly more while reaping large environmental and resource returns and providing farmers equal or greater income support.

I myself own farmland and have always felt awkward about the subsidy checks that FSA sends me for something that I would do anyway. The reason I am enrolled in the farm programs is to participate in the conservation initiatives such as CRP and CREP. I would be happy to give up my direct and countercyclical payments in return for CSP payments because I would be able to directly connect that to tangible benefits for myself, my neighbors, and society and I think many others would feel the same way.

Another change I would recommend is raising the technical assistance cap from 15% to 20%. For many years Minnesota has had an effective conservation cost share program (that also uses a maximum 75% cost share rate) that allows up to 20% of the funds to be used for administration and technical assistance.

Thank you for your time, efforts, and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dave Jungst". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Dave Jungst, Administrator, Stevens Soil and Water Conservation District, Morris, Minnesota